

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. An electronic color image capture system for producing an accurate color reproduction of an input image, said system comprising:

an imaging section for capturing the input image and generating a plurality of color image signals from the captured image, said imaging section having predetermined spectral sensitivities defining the spectral response of the imaging section;

an optical section for separating the input image into its separate color content and directing the separate color content toward said imaging section, said optical section having specific spectral characteristics which define the spectral response of the optical section;

wherein the spectral responses of the optical section and the imaging section are selected so as to cascade together to provide all-positive, symmetrical system curves modeled upon red, green and blue color matching functions representative of the human visual system, said color matching functions being derived from three monochromatic light sources and containing no more than three positive lobes as well as one or more negative lobes, and whereby the areas under the color matching functions determined by (a) summation of all negative lobes and (b) overlap between the green and red color matching functions are minimized; and

a processor including a color correction matrix with coefficients optimized for signal-to-noise performance for producing an output color image from the color image signals exhibiting an accurate color reproduction of the input image.

2. The system as claimed in claim 1 wherein the color correction matrix applied by the processor includes matrix coefficients that are selected by minimizing (a) the color difference between the color image signals and the human visual system and (b) the level of signal noise in the color image signals.

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3. The system as claimed in claim 1 whereby the conditions that the areas under the color matching functions, as (a) determined by the summation of all negative lobes be minimized and (b) determined by the overlap between the green and red sensitivity curves be minimized, are constrained by the requirement that the largest possible color gamut is maintained in the output color image.

4. The system as claimed in claim 1 wherein said imaging section includes three image sensors and the optical section includes a beam splitter for directing image light of separate color content toward the respective image sensors.

5. The system as claimed in claim 1 wherein said imaging section includes an image sensor and the optical section comprises one or more color selective components integrally formed with the sensor for directing image light of separate color content upon the sensor.

6. The system as claimed in claim 1 wherein the spectral responses of the optical section and the imaging section are selected so as to cascade together to provide all-positive, Gaussian system curves modeled upon said red, green and blue color matching functions.

7. An electronic color capture system for capturing a color image and producing an accurate color reproduction of the color image, said system comprising:

a plurality of image sensors for capturing the image and generating a plurality of color image signals from the captured image, each image sensor having predetermined spectral sensitivities defining the spectral response of the image sensor;

an optical section including at least one optical element for directing image light of a particular color content toward each image sensor and at least one cutoff filter in an optical path of each image sensor for filtering the color light content directed upon the respective image sensor, said optical section having spectral characteristics comprised of specific optical element characteristics and specific filter characteristics which together define the spectral response of the optical section;

wherein the spectral responses of the optical section and the image sensors are selected so as to cascade together to provide all-positive, Gaussian system curves modeled upon red, green and blue color matching functions representative of the human visual system and derived from three monochromatic light sources, said color matching functions containing no more than three positive lobes as well as one or more negative lobes, and whereby the areas under the color matching functions (a) determined by summation of all negative lobes is minimized and (b) determined by overlap between the green and red color matching functions is minimized ;

a color correction matrix containing matrix coefficients that are selected by minimizing at least two error measuring parameters including one parameter measuring the color difference between the color image signals and the human visual system and the other parameter measuring the level of signal noise in the color image signals; and

a processor for applying the color correction matrix to the color image signals produced by the image sensors, thereby producing an output color image signal exhibiting an accurate color reproduction of the color image.

8. The system as claimed in claim 7 whereby the conditions that the areas under the color matching functions, as (a) determined by the summation of all negative lobes be minimized and (b) determined by the overlap between the green and red sensitivity curves be minimized, are constrained by the

requirement that the largest possible color gamut is maintained in the output color image.

9. The system as claimed in claim 7 wherein said plurality of image sensors includes three image sensors and the optical element is a beam splitter for directing image light of different color content toward the respective image sensors.

10. The system as claimed in claim 7 wherein the error measuring parameter measuring the difference between the color image signals and the human visual system is $\overline{\Delta E_{ab}^*}$, which is calculated according to:

$$\overline{\Delta E_{ab}^*} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^N \Delta E_{ab,i}^*}{N}$$

where the color difference value $\Delta E_{ab,i}^*$ for a diagnostic color patch set containing N patches is calculated for the difference between the 1976 CIE $(L^*a^*b^*)$ -space (CIELAB space) coordinates for each patch and the 1976 CIE $(L^*a^*b^*)$ -space coordinates which correspond to a transformation of the exposure signals captured by the image sensors.

11. The system as claimed in claim 10 wherein $\overline{\Delta E_{ab}^*} \leq 2.5$.

12. The system as claimed in claim 7 wherein the parameter measuring the level of signal noise in the color image signals is a parameter Ψ_N defined as the sum of the square roots of the sum of the squares of the matrix coefficients of each row in the color correction matrix which transforms the color image signals.

13. The system as claimed in claim 12 wherein $\Psi_N \leq 3.5$.

14. The system as claimed in claim 7 wherein each of the Gaussian system curves is described by two parameters, as shown in the following equation:

$$F_k(\lambda) = e^{-\left(\frac{\lambda - \bar{\lambda}_k}{2\sigma_k}\right)^2}$$

where k represents each of the three channels (r, g, b), $\bar{\lambda}_k$ is the mean value of the Gaussian curve corresponding to channel k and σ_k is the standard deviation value corresponding to channel k and the following set of parameters defines a set of Gaussian curves that best matches the red, green and blue color-matching functions:

$$\bar{\lambda}_R = 600nm$$

$$\bar{\lambda}_G = 550nm$$

$$\bar{\lambda}_B = 450nm$$

$$\sigma_R = 75nm$$

$$\sigma_G = 65nm$$

$$\sigma_B = 60nm$$

15. A method for capturing an image and producing an accurate color reproduction of the image, said method comprising the steps of:

providing an imaging section having predetermined spectral sensitivities defining a spectral response of the imaging section, said imaging section capturing the image and generating a plurality of color image signals from the captured image;

providing an optical section having specific spectral characteristics which define a spectral response of the optical section, said optical section separating the image into its separate color content and directing the separate color content toward said imaging section;

selecting the spectral responses of the optical section and the imaging section so that they cascade together to provide all-positive, symmetrical system curves modeled upon red, green and blue color matching functions representative of the human visual system and derived from three monochromatic light sources, said color matching functions containing no more than three positive lobes as well as one or more negative lobes, and whereby the areas under the color matching functions (a) determined by summation of all negative lobes is minimized and (b) determined by overlap between the green and red color matching functions is minimized; and

processing the color image signals with a color correction matrix having coefficients optimized for signal-to-noise performance for producing an output color image from the color image signals exhibiting an accurate color reproduction of the color image.

16. The method as claimed in claim 15 wherein the color correction matrix includes matrix coefficients that are selected by minimizing (a) the color difference between the color image signals and the human visual system and (b) the level of signal noise in the color image signals.

17. The method as claimed in claim 15 whereby the conditions that the areas under the color matching functions, as (a) determined by the summation of all negative lobes be minimized and (b) determined by the overlap between the green and red sensitivity curves be minimized, are constrained by the requirement that the largest possible color gamut is maintained in the output color image.

18. The method as claimed in claim 15 wherein the spectral responses of the optical section and the imaging section are selected so as to cascade together to provide all-positive, Gaussian system curves modeled upon said red, green and blue color matching functions.